

# Sex as God intended it to be

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## **Sex as God intended it to be**

A sermon preached at Poplar Baptist Church in the morning service by Henry Dixon on 7th of November 2004

Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command. I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. (1 Corinthians 7.1-7)

## **Introduction**

One wonderful thing about the Bible is that it speaks about the whole of life, including marriage and sexual relations, in a way

which is real and practical, without being in any way immodest or indecent. One passage which speaks of these matters is chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians. The whole chapter is dealing with matters relating to this subject: singleness, marriage, sex within marriage, divorce, widowhood, remarriage. We know from verse 1 that the apostle Paul wrote the instructions in this chapter in response to a request for help from the church at Corinth. This chapter contains Paul's answer to their questions.

In the section quoted above the apostle deals with a question which it would seem was in the mind of the church, and that is, whether marriage, and sex within marriage, is bad, or at least something which a truly spiritually minded person ought not to participate in. The apostle's answer, in a nutshell, is to say that not to marry is completely valid option for a Christian, but, because of the temptation to sexual immorality, the wise thing is for most Christians is to get married. Those who are married should without any sense of guilt or shame enjoy a sexual relationship with their marriage partners. They should not, for some false reason of trying to be "spiritual" abandon sexual relations with their spouses.

### **1. Not to get married is a valid option**

Paul says in verse 1, according to the NIV, "It is good for a man not to marry." The literal translation is in fact "It is good for a man not to touch a woman."

What is the apostle saying here? He is saying that it is quite OK for a man not to get married, and indeed it is quite OK for a man to go through the whole of his life without ever touching a woman in a sexual way. There is nothing strange or cranky or weird about living and dying a virgin.

In saying this, he is not saying that marriage, and sex within marriage, are bad or evil. Marriage, and sex within marriage, are good, having been created by God. But the option of not marrying, and living a life of complete celibacy is also a good and valid option. This ties up with what the Lord says. After giving teaching about marriage and divorce, he says

Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage [literally made themselves eunuchs] because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it. (Matthew 19.11 – 12)

This is something which is very important for us to hear in today's culture. There are huge pressures today on many, especially teenagers at school, not so much to marry, as to have some sort of sexual experience, so that they can say they have experienced sex for themselves. There is an idea around that you need to at least try sex, in order to be a complete human being. This is a lie of Satan. To have sex with someone

outside of marriage is very damaging and dishonouring to God, and shameful. It does not enhance your experience of life, but ruins it. It is very mistaken to think that if you have never experienced sex you are somehow inadequate. To live a whole life without ever having experienced sex is a completely valid option. Jesus was a virgin all his life, yet had a totally fulfilled life, and many others have lived and died as virgins yet lived very productive and fulfilled lives. So if you are single, and sex is not a particularly big issue for you, do not worry about your state or feel under pressure to marry.

## **2. To get married is a sensible and wise thing to do for most people**

Having said that it is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman, the apostle then immediately qualifies this by saying, in verse 2, "But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband."

Because there is so much immorality around us, and because most of us do have quite strong sexual desires, the sensible thing for most people to do is, in fact, to get married. God has provided a way out of sexual temptation in a very practical way by providing the institution of marriage. That is not the only reason for marriage. Marriage is good, and goes back to Creation, before the fall, before anybody knew anything about sexual immorality. But now that we are in a fallen state, there is another, very practical reason, for getting married: to avoid the sin of sexual immorality.

So Paul says, in order to avoid sexual temptation, let each man have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. And the verb “to have” in certain contexts in the Bible carries with it the connotation of having a sexual relationship. It is used in chapter 5 verse 1 of this letter to describe an immoral sexual relationship that a member of the church was involved with, and that Paul rebuked the church for tolerating. Clearly the passage we are considering now is also a context where the word carries a sexual connotation. So by saying let each man “have” his own wife, he is saying let each man direct his sexual desires towards his own wife, and “spend” them on her. He should have her, rather than having a colleague at work, or someone he met at a club, or a prostitute. And each woman should “have” her own husband, and direct her sexual desires towards her own husband. Marriage is not an automatic remedy for sexual immorality. There must be an absolute determination on the part of the man to focus all desire exclusively onto his wife, and likewise for the wife to focus all desires onto her husband.

So there is a very practical message for those struggling with sexual temptation. Are you a married man who is struggling with temptation in the area of sexual immorality? Then God has already given you the answer to your temptation. Turn all your sexual desires towards your own wife, and enjoy as full a sexual relationship with her as she feels able to have with you. And a married woman should deal with her sexual temptation by channelling her desires towards her own husband. Are you single and struggling with sexual

temptation? Seek to get married. If you are a man who already has a girlfriend or fiancé and you are being tempted sexually, and the girl is someone you could legitimately marry, then God's answer for your temptation is, perhaps literally, staring you in the face: marry the girl. You might say, "I can't afford to get married at the moment." Can you afford not to, if you are in real danger of falling into sin with your girlfriend or fiancé? If you are a man who has sexual desires and does not have a girlfriend, actively look for a young woman to marry. Look within your current circle of acquaintances, and look outside. Ask your parents for advice. Ask pastors, or spiritually minded older people in other churches, if they are aware of any young women in their congregations whom they would commend. Look, not so much for a woman with stunning physical looks, but for a woman with "the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight" (I Peter 3.4). And if you are a single woman who has sexual desires, do not put up insuperable barriers to marriage if a godly young man takes an interest in you. Take the way out that God is providing for you.

### **3. Those who are married should have enjoy a rich sexual relationship with their spouses, without a sense of shame**

Paul goes on to say in verse 3, "The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband". The literal translation of this is that the husband "should pay the debt he owes to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband." From the context, both before and after, it is

clear that the apostle here is talking about the “debt” that the husband owes to his wife in the matter of sex, and the “debt” that the wife owes her husband in the same matter.

The assumption lying behind this is that sex is a gift from God for husbands and wives, and it is not evil or wrong. It goes back to the beginning of time, before men and women fell into sin. We read in Genesis 2 that God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, and so he created the woman out of man, and gave her to the man. When the man saw her, he was absolutely delighted with her, and said “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman’, for she was taken out of man.” Then the text goes on to say that this is the reason for marriage and sex within marriage, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 2.23 – 24). We know from other Scriptures that the phrase “become one flesh” is talking about the unity which comes about as a man and his wife join together in sexual union. So we see that sex between a husband and wife is created by God, and is good, and helps to join them together.

This teaching is quite contrary to the Roman Catholic view of sex. This sees sex as a sort of necessary evil in order to produce children. It sees it as “dirty” and something which if you are going to be really spiritual you will not engage in. This is why the Roman Catholic “Church” does not allow its “priests” to marry, and those who are not priests and who do marry are not encouraged to have sex with their spouses. This false view

of sex affects many others, not just Roman Catholics. There are many who, even though their sexual experience is entirely within marriage, feel guilty or ashamed about sex, and either abstain altogether or feel guilty when they do have sex with their marriage partner. Some perhaps also react against the gross abuse of sex by our culture, and start to see sex as somehow evil or dirty. The truth is that there is absolutely nothing wrong with sex within marriage. If you are married you do not need to feel guilty if you have sex with your own marriage partner. Sex is only sinful when it takes place outside of marriage.

So the apostle says that the husband should “fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.” It may seem strange to see sex spoken of as a duty and an obligation, when sexual desire is obviously so strong in many people. The reality is that sometimes the husband will have a sexual desire that the wife does not have, and sometimes the wife will have a sexual desire that the husband does not have. What the apostle says here is that if you are married you have an obligation in the sexual area to your spouse, and you should provide for the sexual needs of your spouse, even if you do not have a strong desire for sex yourself.

This is reinforced by what the apostle says in the next verse, verse 4, “The wife’s body does not belong to her alone, but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone, but also to his wife.” The literal translation of this is very striking. It is “the woman does not



have authority over her own body but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." When a man and a woman marry they surrender authority over their bodies to one another.

Then the apostle says in the next verse, verse 5, that husbands and wives should not "deprive each other [literally defraud each other], except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you can devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." There should not be a unilateral withholding of sexual relations. If there is abstention it should be by mutual agreement, and then only for a limited period to give an opportunity (literally leisure) for prayer, but then they should come back together again. Otherwise, says the apostle, Satan may tempt you through lack of self-control. You and your spouse may agree together to go without sex for a period so that you have more time and energy for prayer. The danger is that if you go without sex for too long one of you may be tempted to seek satisfaction in a sinful way, and Satan could bring great harm upon your marriage and your Christian life. Do not put temptation in harm's way. Keep periods of sexual abstinence short, in case one of you should get tempted to sexual immorality.

Clearly, it would be completely inappropriate for a husband to use these verses as a "weapon" to force his wife to have sex with him against her will, or when she is exhausted through overwork, or in ill-health, or she feels alienated from her

husband. That would be a gross abuse of this passage, and would be utterly contrary to the teaching of Scripture that a husband should love his wife as Christ loved the church. The husband should love his wife as he loves his own body (Ephesians 5.28), and he should be considerate of the physical and emotional state of his wife before he approaches her for sexual relations. If his wife has lost the desire for sex, rather than demanding his rights, the husband should ask if there is anything in his behaviour which has caused his wife to cool in her desire for him, and if necessary apologise and seek to put things right. And of course the same is true for a wife. She should not insist on her right for sex, but should be considerate of her husband's physical and emotional state.

Rather than giving the husband the right to demand sex from his wife, what this passage says is that the husband should do all in his power to satisfy his wife's desires, and the wife should do all she can to satisfy her husband's desires. The motivation should be to give, rather than to receive. And in God's goodness, as a husband gives himself to his wife, so he will receive, and as the wife gives herself to her husband she will receive. Jesus said "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6.38). This is a general principle for all of life, and it is as true for sexual relations within marriage as it is in all other areas.

So we see that the apostle here is applying the principle that we are to serve one another, and to lay down our lives for one another in love, to the area of sexual relations between a man and his wife. The law of love applies to every area of life, even to what goes on between a husband and wife in the intimacy of their own bedroom. Christ is to be Lord of all, including sexual relations between a husband and wife.

What a contrast there is between the Bible's view of sex and the world's view! The world sees sex as a means of exploiting the other person, and of satisfying one's own desires as at the expense of the other. A "partner" is used for a period of time, and then when this partner is no longer found to be satisfying he or she is discarded, and another one is sought. This is the thinking behind casual relationships, pornography and prostitution, and finds its ultimate expression in rape. What this passage teaches, rather, is that sexual relations between a husband and wife should be a means whereby a husband serves his wife and does her good, and a means whereby a wife serves her husband and does him good. Christ did not please himself, but gave of himself for the good of others. He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. So a husband is to give himself to his wife to provide for her sexual needs, and a wife is to give herself to their husband to provide for his sexual needs. A husband should not put up barriers between himself and his wife, and make himself "hard to get", and neither should the wife put up barriers between herself and her husband.

#### **4. Marriage is not compulsory**

Paul finishes this section by saying, in verse 6, that he has said what he has “as a concession, not as a command”. In saying this, I believe he is reiterating what he said in verse 1. Not to marry is a valid option. You do not have to get married. You may marry, and fully enjoy sex within marriage, but you don’t have to get married if you do not want to.

He then says in the next verse “I wish that all men were as I am. But each has his own gift from God, one has one gift, another has that.” Interestingly, he uses here exactly the same word to describe the gifts of being married and single that is used to describe the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Just as in the church one person has one gift of the Holy Spirit, and another person has another, so in the matter of marriage one person has the gift of being married, and the other has the gift of being single. If you are married you should neither envy nor look down on those who are single, and if you are single, you should not neither envy nor look down on those who are married, though you are free to marry if you want to.

As we finish, I want to ask, is there anything that those who are single can learn from what the apostle says about sex within marriage? The answer is, yes. The principle of love which he applies to sex within marriage is a universal principle that applies to all relationships. The practical outworking of that principle as a single person who does not have a sexual relationship with anyone, will be different from the practical

outworking of the principle for a married couple. But the principle is the same: Love should dominate all that we do. In all that we do, we should think of the good of others rather than our own good. We should look for how we can give to others, rather than how we can get from others. We should be looking out for opportunities to serve, rather than to be served.

Where is this love to be found? In Christ. Are you a Christian? Have you trusted in Christ as your Saviour? If not, you will never be able to love as you should. If you are married, you will never be able to love your wife as you should if you do not know Christ. If you are single, you will never be able to live a life in other areas as you should if you do not know Christ. Come to him. Receive from him eternal life, and then, having received it, meditate on his love, so that you can be the loving husband, wife or loving single person that God has called you to be.

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